DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 366 117 EC 302 710

TITLE	Students with Special Educational Needs in Local Schools: Implications for Teacher Education and Development. Summary of the Proceedings of a Joint Conference of the Board of Teacher Registration and the Advisory Council for Special Education Needs (Carseldine, Queensland, Australia, October 18-19, 1991).
INSTITUTION	Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs, Annerley (Australia).; Board of Teacher Registration, Toowong (Australia).
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-7242-5192-8
PUB DATE	Dec 92
NOTE	20p.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Group Discussion; Higher Education; Inservice Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Long Range Planning; *Mainstreaming; Paraprofessional School Personnel; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Professional Development; Social Integration; Teacher Education Curriculum
IDENTIFIERS	*Australia (Queensland)

ABSTRACT

This booklet summarizes results of a conference in Queensland (Australia) concerning the implications for teacher education of integrating students with special educational needs into local schools. The conference arose from two earlier reports of the Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs. Key principles were identified and prioritized. These included: children should be valued and supported in a variety of flexible settings; ongoing professional development should be focused on school improvement and problem solving; and an adequately resourced team approach should involve parents, teachers, therapists, and other community members. The small group discussions and presentations resulted in 19 recommendations in the following areas: (1) principles of preservice and inservice education; (2) course development; (3) course content; (4) the practicum; (5) course length; (6) continuing professional development; and (7) professional development of paraprofessionals and nonteaching professionals. An appendix lists members of the conference planning committee. (DB)

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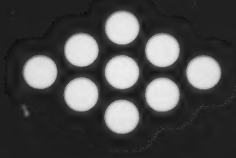

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STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN LOCAL SCHOOLS

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN LOCAL SCHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Early in 1991, the Board of Teacher Registration, in conjunction with the Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs, commenced a widely consultative process to consider the teacher preparation necessary in order for all teachers to be prepared to provide educational programs and support for children with special educational needs in the regular classroom. A working party, with membership as set out in Appendix I, was established to plan and implement the project.

Children with special educational needs, for the purposes of the project and in accordance with the view of the Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs, were considered to be those children with disabilities, learning difficulties and behavioural problems who require support in the form of additional programs, services and other resources in order for them to participate and achieve in regular classrooms.

It is the Board's role to confer and collaborate with employing authorities, teacher education institutions, the teaching profession, teacher organisations and the general community in relation to standards of courses of teacher education acceptable for the purpose of teacher registration.

In view of recent developments such as the notion of inclusive education and the implications of the integration of children with disabilities into regular schools, the Board decided it would be timely to consider issues relating to the preparation of teachers for the education of children with special needs.

Central to the project was a search conference at which participants formulated recommendations based on the shared vision, developed at the conference, of an ideal future for special needs students in local schools.

Prior to the conference, in order to identify issues and canvass as wide a range of views as possible, a large number of organisations and institutions with an interest in the education of children with special needs were invited to forward submissions commenting on the recommendations and goals put forward in two documents prepared by the Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs, *Strategies for Change: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in*

Regular Schools and *The Way Ahead: Meeting a Wider Range of Educational Needs in Regular Schools*.

In the final phase of the project, conference outcomes were circulated to the same group of organisations and institutions as was initially consulted, with an invitation to respond.

The Board has a more extensive collation of responses to the Advisory Council documents and the Search Conference recommendations which is available on request.

RESPONSES TO THE TWO REPORTS OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Although the Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs had already invited comment on its documents *Strategies for Change* and *The Way Ahead*, the working party decided to circulate the reports again with a view to obtaining responses specifically related to teacher education.

The joint Board of Teacher Registration and Advisory Council Working Party invited eighty-three organisations and institutions with an interest in the education of children with special needs to forward submissions commenting on the recommendations, issues and goals put forward in these two documents prepared by the Advisory Council towards the end of 1990.

In *Strategies for Change: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Regular Schools*, the Council identified three critical issues to be resolved in the formulation of policies and practices appropriate in educational provision for students with special educational needs. A number of goals were put forward in relation to each issue.

In *The Way Ahead: Meeting a Wider Range of Educational Needs in Regular Schools*, the implications for preservice teacher education were considered. The Advisory Council made a number of recommendations concerning the teacher preparation necessary to meet the personal and learning needs of children with special educational needs in regular schools.

Although many relevant bodies had already responded to the Advisory Council, submissions were received from 31 organisations and institutions. However, of these, a number of organisations submitted policy documents or statements or

information about the organisation or a particular type of disability, with no direct comment on the Council reports.

General support for the views contained in one or both Council reports was expressed by most of the responding organisations. Others stated their approval of the government's support for special needs students in regular schools or of its mainstreaming policy, or endorsed the need for improvement in preservice and inservice teacher education.

Most respondents did more than express general support: reference was made to specific issues and goals in *Strategies for Change* and/or specific recommendations in *The Way Ahead*. It was significant that these organisations did not forward negative reactions or oppose the views in the documents. Other comments, suggestions, recommendations or statements were also made regarding preservice teacher education, inservice teacher education and other matters related to the education of special educational needs students.

REPORT OF THE SEARCH CONFERENCE

The conference titled *Students with Special Educational Needs in Local Schools: Implications for Teacher Education and Development* was jointly sponsored and organised by the Board of Teacher Registration and the Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs. It was held at the Carseldine Campus of Queensland University of Technology over two days - Friday 18 and Saturday 19 October 1991.

The goals of the conference were:

1. To provide a forum to consider issues associated with initial preparation and continuing development and support of teachers in relation to the education of students with special educational needs in local schools.

2. To provide advice to the Board of Teacher Registration and the Ministerial Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs on issues associated with the professional preparation and continuing professional development of teachers in relation to the education of students with special educational needs in local schools.

Prior to the conference, participants had been sent a number of background papers and the report on comments received in response to the call for written

submissions on the Advisory Council's reports, *Strategies for Change* and *The Way Ahead*.

Approximately 50 people participated in the conference. Invitations had been extended to particular individuals and relevant organisations had been invited to nominate representatives to attend. Participants were drawn from the following groups: teacher employing authorities, higher education institutions, teacher professional associations, school parent and community organisations, associations of other professions with a role in the education or welfare of special needs students, community organisations and institutions concerned with the welfare of special needs children, and school curriculum bodies.

The conference was opened with a brief address by Professor John Elkins, who spoke about the origin and purpose of the conference. Professor Elkins was a member of the Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs and had chaired the conference planning group.

The conference took the form of a search conference and was facilitated by staff members of the Department of Education with expertise in professional development: Mr Richard Cameron, Ms Pam Clayton and Ms Toni Johnston. At the conference, the facilitators provided each participant with a work book for each day which explained the search conference process; suggested some ground rules for effective group work in the conference; and, for each step in the process, gave detailed directions and provided worksheets. Much work was carried out in small interest groups.

On Day 1, participants developed a shared vision of the ideal future regarding special needs students in local schools. The vision was amended to take into account wider influences (other changes in the outside world), the views of all stakeholders (all those who affect or are affected by the education of special needs students in local schools) and additional information in the form of short presentations by local people with relevant first-hand experience (Ms Lesley Murphy, a classroom teacher with special needs children in her class; Mrs Helen Dickson, a parent of a special needs child; and Ms Leanne Deede, a school student with a disability).

At the end of the first day, all ideas were prioritised by two rounds of voting. In the first round, participants voted according to 'importance', or for those items which best described the community they would like to see. In the second round, participants selected those items which required most improvement and were most capable of being achieved.

It was interesting to note that the same three items headed each prioritised list. Firstly, participants considered that in an ideal future, children would be valued, supported, and achieving through receiving appropriate programs in a variety of flexible settings. The concepts of equity and of valuing all children recurred frequently in items throughout the lists with statements such as 'teachers are committed to the principle that all children have the right to achieve to full potential with adequate support'. In later stages of the conference recommendations were developed which paralleled these ideals.

The item which was rated second in the list which was prioritised according to 'importance' envisaged preservice and inservice education for teachers and other staff would be ongoing, focused on school improvement, oriented towards problem-solving and coupled with education for parents and community members. Other items on the list reflected the importance attached by many participants to appropriate preservice and inservice teacher education which would produce competent, confident teachers able to meet the needs of all children.

The item which was placed third on the list of items prioritised by importance proposed there should be an adequately resourced team approach involving parents, teachers, therapists and other community members. The need for cooperation, a team approach and access to a wide range of support in the education of children with special needs was a recurring theme as was the need for adequate support and resources. These ideas were prominent in the recommendations which were developed later in the conference. It was also suggested that employing authorities should facilitate access to expertise and resources to meet the needs of all students and promote the active involvement of parents and community members in the education of special needs children.

The items which made up participants' vision for the future formed the basis for the subsequent development of recommendations, and, as indicated above, the recommendations closely reflect many of the vision statements.

As the conference goals were concerned with providing advice about the initial preparation and continuing professional development of teachers, participants focused on these areas when prioritising recommendations by voting in the concluding stages of the conference, with each participant having 10 votes to distribute across recommendations in whatever way they wished.

The conference was closed by the Board's Chair, Miss Merline Muldoon, who looked forward to future action to increase the effectiveness of provision for special needs students in local schools.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations proposed by discussion groups and voted upon by conference participants were subsequently consolidated by the joint Board of Teacher Registration and Advisory Council Working Party into the following recommendations concerning particular aspects of preservice and inservice teacher education with specific reference to children with disabilities, learning difficulties and behavioural problems.

It was recognised that children's special needs fall naturally within the total continuum of needs experienced by children and that teachers must be able to ensure rewarding learning experiences for all.

The institutions and organisations initially contacted in the first phase of the project were forwarded a copy of the conference report and invited to comment briefly on the recommendations. General support for all, or for sections of, the recommendations was expressed by most respondents. A number of organisations also provided comments, either of a general nature, or relating to specific aspects of the report, and presented a variety of perspectives. Some universities acknowledged the importance of the recommendations, and provided information about developments and opportunities in the special needs area at that university. A number of respondents indicated that the intent of the recommendations corresponded well with the policies of their association. In some cases, universities intimated that the recommendations would be considered in the process of course development.

Many organisations and institutions provided focused responses according to each recommendation.

Recommendations are ordered under the headings:

- principles of preservice and inservice education
- course development
- course content
- the practicum
- course length
- continuing professional development
- professional development of paraprofessionals and non-teaching professionals.

Principles of Preservice and Inservice Education

The appropriateness of teacher education programs was given attention and certain principles were suggested as worthwhile.

Recommendation 1

The development and conduct of preservice and inservice teacher education courses should reflect attitudes and values that support and promote the dignity and uniqueness of each individual and provide for:

- *articulation of the principles and practices of inclusive education which makes provision for all learners;*
- *modelling of effective classroom management, teaching and evaluation strategies.*

Respondents generally commended the principles about teacher education expressed in Recommendation 1, although some expressed reservations concerning the difficulties of ensuring the principles and practices of inclusive education and the skills gained in teacher education were transferred to actual practice. It was suggested that situations where good practice was occurring should be identified and used for practice teaching.

Course Development

A recommendation concerning input to teacher education courses received wide support at the conference:

Recommendation 2

People with special needs and the parents of special needs children should be involved directly in the structuring and conduct of teacher education.

A further suggestion was made that students with special needs should be encouraged to consider teaching or other professional careers in schools.

The notion of involvement by parents of special needs children in the structuring and content of teacher education was supported by responding organisations, and some believed this should be extended to include community and professional bodies. It was considered that further explanation of the nature and extent of

parental involvement would be helpful, by expansion with such examples as: the inclusion of a parent of a person with a disability on a course development committee; or involvement of a person with a disability in the presentation of some content.

Course Content

Several recommendations which were given high priority concerned the content of preservice and inservice teacher education courses:

> **Recommendation 3**
>
> *Preservice and inservice teacher education courses should include studies to enable teachers to develop positive attitudes towards and to support special needs children. Courses should provide skills and experiences relating to:*
>
> - *collaboration, consultation, communication and negotiation with other professionals and members of the educational community;*
> - *the development and maintenance of teams involving professionals from a number of disciplines;*
> - *action research;*
> - *multidisciplinary problem-solving;*
> - *the ethics of teaching, and equity and social justice;*
> - *curriculum planning and development of individual educational programs.*

Responses supported the idea that all preservice teacher education students should gain awareness of and knowledge about students with special educational needs.

> **Recommendation 4**
>
> *Preservice and inservice teacher education courses should introduce all teachers to the full range of developmentally appropriate educational contexts.*

It was suggested that the notion of 'developmentally appropriate contexts' in Recommendation 4 should be linked to the 'whole of life' concept in Recommendation 5. It was emphasised that experiences should be provided of a

number of special educational settings and different school sectors to provide teachers with a general understanding.

Recommendation 5

Teacher education courses should be designed to provide an overview of education in a 'whole of life' context, including the following areas:

- *parent education*
- *vocational preparation*
- *adult learning*
- *life skills*
- *adult literacy and numeracy.*

In addition, elective studies should be available in areas such as vocational preparation and adult learning, and provision made for all students to study some areas in more depth.

Recommendation 6

Preservice and inservice courses should provide:

(a) *a substantial knowledge base of processes in learning, thinking, and development; and*

(b) *skills of:*

- *educationally applied behaviour analysis and management;*
- *interpersonal counselling;*
- *cognitive-instructional design.*

It was emphasised that the knowledge base and skills referred to in Recommendation 6 must be viewed as pertaining to both specialist and generalist teachers and that equipping all teachers with general skills is an important part of the preparation to teach students with special educational needs.

Many participants considered it was important for all teachers to be provided with necessary information about support services and government policy:

Recommendation 7

Preservice and inservice teacher education courses should include:

- *information about current government policies, initiatives and priorities;*

- *activities and coursework to enable teachers to identify, access and develop special needs support services and resources systematically.*

Respondents supported the recommendation that all teachers should be provided with information on support services and current government policies, initiatives and practices, and it was further suggested that an awareness of relevant reports in the area should be included.

Many organisations and institutions generally endorsed Recommendations 3 to 7 which related to course content, with respondents recognising that teachers must be responsive to the principles of inclusive education and cater for all students in the regular classroom as an outcome of the integration process. A number of bodies made specific comments about the content of teacher education courses, for example the need for direct input from therapists and other professionals.

Some universities expressed the view that to implement the recommendations would require an expansion of preservice preparation and provision of ongoing inservice education. One suggested if change was to occur at the classroom level teacher preparation should focus on teacher empowerment, with teachers being the locus of change at school and classroom level.

The Practicum

Participants emphasised the important role of the practicum in promoting appropriate attitudes and developing awareness of special educational needs.

The practical experience component of teacher education programs received specific consideration by participants in the following recommendations:

Recommendation 8

The value of the practicum in preservice teacher education should be reflected in the length of time allocated to the practicum, its placement in school and university calendars, and in supervision arrangements.

Recommendation 9

The practicum should be developmental, structured, and based on demonstrated exemplary practices in schools.

Recommendation 10

Supervisors of the practicum should be selected on the basis of demonstrated expertise and should receive appropriate professional recognition.

Recommendation 11

The practicum for all students should include supervised experiences of and with learners with special needs.

A number of participants suggested it could be beneficial to undertake further research about the practicum and there should be support for the research and evaluation of the practicum by all professionals.

Some participants expressed concern that Federal Government funding policies could inhibit the development of desired teacher education courses by, for example, limiting lecturer-student contact time and by placing limitations on the quality and quantity of school experience.

All respondents recognised the importance of the practicum in preservice programs, although problems associated with the expense and with the quality of supervisory teachers were noted by one university.

It was suggested the notion of transition from university to teaching should be considered, including mentoring and support for beginning teachers.

Course Length

Conference participants were of the view that, in order to accommodate adequate studies concerning the education of children with special needs, in addition to catering to demands from many other areas of the curriculum, all preservice teacher education programs should involve at least four years of higher education. While many participants argued that such a requirement should be introduced immediately, others suggested that notice should be given that it would take effect for courses commencing from 1995.

A number of participants also put forward the view that all preservice teacher education courses should include a minimum of four semesters of professional studies.

Recommendation 12

All preservice teacher education programs should involve at least four years of higher education in order to accommodate the needs of prospective teachers in the area of the education of children with special needs.

This recommendation received strong support from responding organisations.

Continuing Professional Development

A large number of recommendations developed at the conference specifically addressed the continuing professional development of teachers. Participants considered inservice education should be seen as part of the processes of Collaborative Performance Review and School Development Planning. It was proposed that students and teachers be exposed to shared decision-making philosophies and techniques and self-evaluation strategies so that they can take full advantage of these processes.

Recommendations 13 to 18, focusing on the continuing professional development of teachers, were endorsed by responding organisations. It was noted that there were also employer and system responsibilities for inservice education, and adequate provision of resources was necessary.

Bodies variously commented that there should be initiatives to enhance teacher development, and provide access to, and support for, ongoing professional development for teachers to gain sufficient expertise and confidence to cater for students with special needs. It was stated in one response that the immediate impact on teachers' instructional behaviour and attitudes would be through inservice education.

It was suggested that provision of inservice education for all school personnel should be articulated in school development plans as soon as possible.

Recommendation 13

The processes of Collaborative Performance Review and School Development Planning should be used to identify inservice education needs of all school personnel with respect to the identification, management and education of special needs students.

Recommendation 14

Providers of professional development (e.g. schools, support centres, consultants, tertiary institutions, etc.) should implement flexible responses to school-based needs, coupled with education for parents and the community.

It was viewed as essential by many participants that teachers receive recognition for all professional development.

Conference participants proposed that 'Centres of Excellence' which promoted research about, and demonstrated excellence in, the teaching of children with low incidence disabilities should be accessible to teachers for professional development purposes.

Recommendation 15

'Centres of Excellence' should be established by government and non-government school systems and by universities to assist in the professional education of teachers.

From comments it was clear that the notion of 'centres of excellence' needs to be further developed, but this recommendation reflects the views of people that better examples of good practice need to be provided for students.

Recommendation 16

A consortium of appropriate bodies should institute flexible processes by which teachers can gain recognition for professional learning acquired through a wide range of professional development activities.

Participants were particularly concerned that expertise about low incidence disabilities be maintained and developed.

Recommendation 17

Inservice teacher education to enhance the teaching of children with low incidence disabilities should include transdisciplinary team operation, and awareness of, and knowledge from, associated disciplines.

Comments were made to the effect that it should be emphasised that in Recommendation 17 the teacher preparation to enhance the teaching of children with low incidence disabilities, referred to all teachers not only specialist teachers.

Concern was expressed about continuing support for services and facilities for supporting low incidence disability groups:

Recommendation 18

Government funding for associations and facilities for low incidence groups should be maintained to allow for the adequate provision of services, resources, and inservice teacher education.

One comment was made to the effect that, as Recommendation 18 is the only recommendation which referred to funding, it could be more broadly based. In a similar vein, another response indicated that the role of all associations in provision of inservice education should be recognised. Another respondent expressed the view that access to people with expertise would be particularly important in regions without access to other support.

In relation to this last point, it should be noted that issues relating to the difficulties associated with the education of children with special needs in rural/isolated areas have not been specifically addressed.

Professional Development of Paraprofessionals and Non-teaching Professionals

The important role of other professionals and paraprofessionals in the education of children with special needs was emphasised.

Recommendation 19

The professional development needs of non-teaching professionals (e.g. therapists, nurses, psychologists, social workers) and paraprofessionals should be supported by:

(i) financial support, including paid study leave, from employing authorities;

(ii) provision of appropriate professional development programs.

A further suggestion was put forward that universities accept increased numbers of paraprofessionals and other professionals in courses to accommodate increased demand necessitated by implementation of a transdisciplinary approach.

This recommendation was supported by a number of respondents, some of whom suggested widening the focus to include parents, aides and volunteers.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations developed at the conference, as well as being strongly supported by responding organisations and institutions, reflected statements in the Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs documents.

There was a general concurrence on the vision for the future expressed in the Council documents and at the search conference, that children with special educational needs should be provided with support in the form of varied educational programs, resources and services so that they may participate fully in regular school classrooms.

It was the role of the search conference to consider issues associated with the initial preparation and continuing professional development of teachers in relation to the education of students with special educational needs in local schools, therefore many of the ensuing recommendations reinforced those put forward in the Advisory Council's document *The Way Ahead*. In addition, many of the issues identified in *Strategies for Change* in relation to the provision of education for students with special educational needs in regular schools received further consideration in the conference debate and to some extent were addressed in the recommendations.

The conference recommendations also reflect many of the visionary statements expressed in the early stages of the conference process. Many respondents looked forward to the implementation of the recommendations and to the provision of an inclusive curriculum which caters for all children and their special needs in the local school.

The Board of Teacher Registration's *Guidelines on the Acceptability of Teacher Education Programs for Teacher Registration Purposes* indicate that programs should take into account relevant current reports and recommendations, including those published by the Board from time to time. The *Guidelines* ask that, through professional studies and practical experiences, programs seek to prepare graduates

for developing curriculum and effective teaching approaches for pupils with a wide variety of personal characteristics and educational needs, for working cooperatively with professional colleagues, and for accessing the support networks available to assist them in these roles.

The recommendations in this report provide valuable suggestions as to ways in which preservice teacher education programs and inservice professional development might best meet the professional needs of teachers in working with the wide variety of students who make up their school communities.

SUGGESTED READING

Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs (1990) *Strategies for Change: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Regular Schools.*

Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs (1990) *The Way Ahead: Meeting a Wider Range of Educational Needs in Regular Schools.*

Department of Education (1992) *Ascertainment Guidelines for Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties.*

Department of Education (1992) *Policy and Management Plan: Educational Provision for Students with Disabilities.*

Raynes, M, Snell, M and Sailor, W (1991) A fresh look at categorical programs for children with special needs. *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol 73, no 4, December. (This article provides a useful introduction to the concept of inclusive education.)

Schattman, R and Benay, J (1992) Inclusive practices transform special education in the 1990s. *The School Administrator*, vol 49, February, pp 8-12. (This article describes characteristics of schools that have adopted an inclusive approach to education.)

Wong, B Y L (1989) Critical knowledge and skills required in effective teaching and management of individual differences in the general education classroom. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, vol 12, no 4, pp. 161-163. (This article was provided for participants' pre-conference reading.)

APPENDIX I

CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Chair
Professor J Elkins
Professor of Special Education, Schonell Special Education Research Centre, University of Queensland

Members
Mr L M Dunne
Executive Officer, Queensland Federation of Parents and Friends Associations

Dr G Elias
Senior Lecturer, Division of Education, Griffith University

Mr N H Fry
Director, Board of Teacher Registration

Mr M Janz
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Ms M Kilminster
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Mr J McCollow
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Dr N Pyle
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Associate Professor N Russell
Dean of Education and the Arts, Gold Coast Campus of Griffith University

Ms C L Smith
Subject Master, Macgregor State High School

Dr J Smith
Research Officer, Advisory Council for Special Educational Needs

Facilitators to the Conference

Mr R Cameron	)	Centre for Staff Development,
Ms P Clayton	)	Special Services Centre,
Ms T Johnston	)	Queensland Department of Education

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